



Whistleblowing in the Soviet Union: Complaints and Abuses under State Socialism by Nicholas Lampert

Review by: Alastair McAuley

The Slavonic and East European Review, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Oct., 1986), pp. 642-643

Published by: the [Modern Humanities Research Association](#) and [University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4209411>

Accessed: 15/06/2014 18:48

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Modern Humanities Research Association and University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Slavonic and East European Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Lampert, Nicholas. *Whistleblowing in the Soviet Union: Complaints and Abuses under State Socialism*. Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, with CREES, University of Birmingham, 1985. xi + 210 pp. Bibliography. Notes. Index. £25.00.

As its subtitle implies, this book is a sociological study of the way in which complaints about abuses of the system are handled in the USSR. The focus of the study is on economic crime, embezzlement, bribe-taking, graft, and misappropriation of state property; but the author also deals with 'abuse of office' in a somewhat more general context, including some instances of unfair dismissal.

The analysis is based primarily on a sample of press reports of complaints about abuse. These have been supplemented by interviews with former Soviet citizens, a study of published records of legal decisions, and so on. This material allows Dr Lampert to paint a fascinating picture about the workings of the Soviet system, to highlight some of the ways in which it attempts to defend the righteous 'little man' against the wrath of mighty wrongdoers — and to explain why, too often, these defences fail.

Along the way the author also makes a number of perceptive comments about the sociology of corruption and the nature of the Soviet political system. But, ultimately, I felt that this was where the study was weakest. It does not appear to be based on a clearly thought-out theoretical framework which places criminal acts within a broader conception of social action.

Relative to any set of legal norms, there can clearly be illegal acts; and the state has an obligation to identify and punish those guilty of such acts. But matters are not always so clear-cut. There is a grey area in which actions and decisions may be described as 'criminal' or as 'politically ill-advised' depending upon one's own convictions. (To give an example from recent British experience: the behaviour of the Bank of England over the JMB affair has been described as negligent by some and only ill-judged by others; a few have even defended the governor's decisions!) I suspect that the tendency to perceive as criminal the actions of those with different priorities than oneself will be more marked in systems like that of the Soviet Union where formalized factionalism over policy is not admitted. This study does not cast any light on this issue. We do not know how far complaints about abuse of office — and their investigation — mask local policy disagreements about resource allocation priorities. Or, we do not know whether local political clans make use of the legal system to settle accounts with their rivals. Indeed, the author seems to be only intermittently aware of this political dimension to 'abuse of office'.

There are two further complexities on the conceptual plane that are worth raising in this review. First, a majority of those who complain, who blow the whistle on top managers, are minor functionaries. In general, they write to the authorities to report perceived injustice — particularly unfairness in the distribution of rewards. Dr Lampert comments that they seldom receive a sympathetic reception from high-level institutions because these latter will generally '... share the definition of the situation held by managers lower down'. By this he implies that the whole hierarchy of authority is frequently tarred with the same brush. But it may also be that the conceptual frameworks

of managers and minor functionaries differ; the latter may still conceive of action only in personal terms, may continue to adhere to a conspiratorial view of politics in which decision-makers respond only to personal advantage. Senior management, on the other hand, may have transcended this conceptual world, they may recognize and respond to rational argument. Again, there is little awareness in this study that we as observers should approach the accounts provided by participants with circumspection. There is little recognition that the perceptions of motive or intent ascribed to managers by those who complain may be mistaken and vice versa of course.

The second point referred to above continues this theme. On an intellectual level, Dr Lampert is clearly aware that the raw material for his study, press reports about abuse of office, etc. are produced by participants in the Soviet political process. This means that they cannot be accepted at face value. They do not constitute an objective account of Soviet reality — indeed such an objective account is impossible. Consequently, social analysts must always question the perceptual frameworks and political interests of those who provide their raw material. In this study I feel that, in practice, the author has not always approached the data with enough scepticism.

In conclusion, then, this book is a fascinating and sensitive account of certain aspects of the Soviet system. It should appeal to all those concerned with Soviet and state socialist societies. But it does not provide the general conceptual framework on which a general theory of corruption can be constructed.

University of Essex
Colchester

ALASTAIR MCAULEY

Krawchenko, Bohdan. *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine*. St Antony's College, Oxford in association with Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1985. xix + 333 pp. Tables. Glossary. Map. Notes. Index. £30.00.

In his introduction, the author writes that 'this work examines the effects of social and political change on the national consciousness of Ukrainian workers, peasants, the intelligentsia and political élite'. The focus is on Ukrainians in the Russian Empire and its successor state, the Soviet Union; Western Ukraine is brought into the picture in connection with the integration of these territories during and after the Second World War.

The presentation is chronological, beginning with a chapter on 'Ukrainian Society on the Eve of the Revolution'. In fact, this first chapter delivers more than one would suspect from its title. It includes an historical excursion into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, thereby providing an introduction to the problems facing Ukrainians on the road to nationhood: a largely peasant society that was mostly illiterate, an insignificant urban working class, the remnants of a nationally conscious gentry, and a tiny intelligentsia. In a word, borrowed from the language of contemporary social science theory, a society that had quite a way to go before its 'mobilization'.

The succeeding chapters are devoted to the 1920s and 1930s, the Ukraine in the Second World War, and the post-war development of Ukrainian society